

Columbus/Bartholomew Planning Department
Annual Report:
2002

Department Overview

The year 2002 has seen several major changes in community land use and planning efforts. Interestingly, some of the activity is not reflected in high-visibility public decisions such as rezoning votes, as compared to previous years. For the most part, 2002 witnessed already-conceptually-approved projects moving through the detailed site planning and building processes. Some notable examples include the new Menard's store on West SR 46, the tip of the retail iceberg in that location; the construction of the new Super Wal-Mart in the 10th Street-National Road retail cluster; and the third phase of the Shadow Creek Farms planned residential community, which continues to grow despite the slowdown in housing demand. Other residential expansions continuing to grow include new phases for Northbrook, Terrace Woods, and Carter's Crossing.

There were a number of important brand-new projects as well. Columbus Center applied for and received approval to allow the southern half of the shopping center, including the old Ames/Hill store and Kerasotes Theater, to be razed so that a new large Target store could be built. Persimmon Woods was approved as a new large-lot residential subdivision on Terrace Lake Road.

The community has been concerned about the number and visibility of older buildings left empty as businesses move to new locations. The news here has been nearly all good, with Eastbrook Plaza, Clifty Crossing, the former Lowe's, the former Sun Electronics building, and Holiday Center all getting new anchor tenants. The Little Creek Plaza commercial area on west SR 46 is now properly rezoned for fresh development and occupancy. And the former Arvin headquarters buildings are occupied, most notably by the United Way social services complex.

Sometimes it is significant that an event or project did *not* happen, and that was the case in 2002 also. Probably the biggest example is the proposed shopping center on the east corner of Taylor Road and U.S. 31 (National Road). This proposal captured considerable staff, Plan Commission, media, and public attention in the spring. The project was withdrawn after planning and engineering staff voiced major concerns about adequacy of streets and traffic circulation, impact on the Clifty Creek floodway and flood fringe, and the overall capacity of greater Columbus to absorb major additional retail growth at this time.

Another land-use proposal that did not bear fruit is the Bartholomew Consolidated School Corporation's building project for Central Middle, Northside Middle, Lincoln Elementary, Southside Middle, and Southside Elementary schools. Perhaps relatively few in the community realized that, had the remonstrance failed and the project moved forward, each school's site plan would have needed approval by the Plan Commission as a special use (SU-1). When and if the school corporation revisits the need for new or modified buildings and grounds, the city staff, appointed officials and the public will have this opportunity to shape the project(s).

Longer-range planning was not neglected in 2002. The City of Columbus now has a new Land Use Plan (Phase2 of the Comprehensive Plan), enacted by City Council and affirmed by Plan Commission in June, and work has begun on a Thoroughfare Plan and a study of the State Street commercial/industrial corridor. Bartholomew County is on the verge of adopting its own Land

Use Plan as well – the first in the county’s history. Progress is being made toward planning for the city’s waterfront along the East Fork White River.

Numerous smaller projects and efforts have occupied staff time and attention, as outlined herein. Although we have not collected complete statistics in previous years, it appears that our workload has steadily increased since at least the mid-1990s.

The Planning Department is proud of its record in saving the taxpayers’ money. Our work is accomplished within a budget of under a half-million dollars annually. We have routinely spent less than our authorized appropriation, without compromising quality of service.

Land development and land-use change in Columbus and Bartholomew County no longer have a down season. Despite the overall economic slowdown in the past two years, greater Columbus continues to grow in population and in most spheres of economic activity. We are ready to continue our solid record of accomplishment in serving the citizens of our community.

City and County Comprehensive Plan Updates

The City's Land Use Element of the Comprehensive Plan (usually known as Phase 2) was formally approved for adoption by City Council in early May 2002; this decision was ratified by the Plan Commission (as required by state law) on June 5, 2002. The Plan's adoption culminated over three years of work on Phase 2 by the Plan Commission, City Council, Planning Department staff, the McBride-Dale-Clarion consulting team, and many citizens and community volunteers. The Plan Commission in particular took almost a full year to review and modify the draft plan, including extensive work sessions and a number of community meetings. City Council held two public forums in February and spent several months reviewing the draft before adoption. The adopted Land Use Plan contains 77 pages of text and maps, plus supplemental material.

Bartholomew County's Land Use Plan element is scheduled for public hearings in December 2002 and January 2003. The County's Plan element has taken longer than anticipated to bring to this stage, because new soil survey data was slower than expected in becoming available. The County obtained this data in raw form in spring 2002, spent the summer mapping it, and incorporated the maps into the new plan element in fall 2002. In October and November, the planning staff facilitated four public meetings to obtain citizen comment in Jackson, Rock Creek, Haw Creek, and German Townships, and the results have incorporated in the draft now slated for public hearing. In addition to these steps, the staff facilitated monthly meetings of the County's Comprehensive Plan work group, which included several Commission members as well as community representatives. The staff anticipates the Board of Commissioners to adopt the plan in late winter or early spring 2003.

Thoroughfare Plan Update

The City's Comprehensive Plan includes several subsidiary elements, such as the recently adopted Land Use Plan. One of the most important is the Thoroughfare Plan. In 2002, the planning staff and Plan Commission had major progress toward updating this Plan, which has not been completely revised since 1967.

In mid-2002, the City entered into a contract with Christopher B. Burke Engineering to update the Thoroughfare Plan. The planning and engineering staff worked with the consultant to prepare a draft Plan for Plan Commission review in fall 2002. The Commission asked staff to arrange a series of public meetings to receive input on the Plan, which are now scheduled for mid-January 2003.

Significant elements in the new Thoroughfare Plan include: stronger and/or clearer standards for street design and street cross-sections; a revised set of functional classifications (primary arterial, secondary collector, etc.); a policy spelling how whether and how the city will participate in street improvements or widening; and rubrics for off-site improvements and shared or supplemental aid projects. The draft Plan contains several brand new sections, including an alley-vacation policy, a private street policy, a critical access corridor plan, and traffic-calming

measures. A thoroughfare map is included that shows planned upgrades to existing streets (e.g., four-laning Rocky Ford Road east of Marr) and anticipated new streets (e.g., Taylor Road extension north).

If all goes well at the public meetings and there are no delays, the Thoroughfare Plan should be ready for City Council consideration by March or April 2003.

State Street Revitalization Grant

The Goals and Policies Element of the City's Comprehensive Plan calls for the city's entrance corridors to receive special planning attention. Once such entrance is State Street, also Indiana Hwy. 46/7. State Street is the main commercial corridor for the traditional Eastside neighborhoods of Columbus, and it also serves as the primary corridor for travelers to and from the southeast: Sand Creek and Rock Creek Townships, Jennings County, and beyond.

State Street's appearance, condition and functionality have been the object of some concern over recent years, as outlined in the Plan. Eastside residents and community leaders have asked that the corridor be studied to determine whether and how commercial areas can be revitalized.

In 2002, the Eastside Community Center asked that the Bartholomew County Board of Commissioners contribute a \$5,000 local match toward an application to the Indiana Dept. of Commerce for a Planning Grant, totaling \$50,000, to study the State Street Corridor. (The County is a major property owner along State Street and has a direct stake in its vitality.) Upon the County's consent, a Steering Committee was formed and a consultant retained to pursue the grant application. At year's end the grant request had been submitted to Commerce and a RFQ for firms to perform the study had been advertised, with selection to take place in mid-January 2003.

Metropolitan Planning Organization

In 2002, Columbus and Bartholomew County were informed by the Federal Highway Administration that greater Columbus has been designated an Urbanized Area as a result of Census 2000. As the name implies, Urbanized Areas are large or medium-sized cities and their fringes. The designation means that Columbus and Bartholomew County (and possibly including the towns of Hope and/or Edinburgh) will be eligible to create a Metropolitan Planning Organization, or MPO. "Metropolitan Planning Organization" is the technical term for a body authorized by FHA to receive transportation funding. Rather than competing for a limited amount of state money with other rural counties and cities, the city and county could tap a dedicated source of transportation funding.

The full meaning and impact of Columbus's MPO status is still unclear. A new MPO has not been authorized in Indiana since 1980. INDOT and FHA are working with city engineering, planning, and public safety staff, as well as county staff, to put in place the necessary steps toward creation of the MPO and acquiring funds. At this point the MPO is expected to be in

place and functioning by late spring 2003.

Zoning Map Changes

Planned Unit Developments

Four new PUD rezoning requests were processed by the city during 2000: Brex Park East (the eastern part of the Menard Inc. project); the shopping center at the William Marr Farm property, east of Taylor Road at U.S. 31 intersection; the new United Way social-services complex at the former Arvin headquarters, 15th and Hutchins; and Little Creek Plaza on SR 46 West. Three of the four were recommended for approval by the Plan Commission and approved by City Council. The Marr Farm project was withdrawn by the petitioners before the Plan Commission public hearing in April, following a staff recommendation for denial.

The plan commission reviewed and approved final PUD plans for the new Menard Inc. store at SR 46 and I-65; the third phase of the Shadow Creek Farms planned community along CR 200 S; and the new Columbus Center Final PUD, which would allow the Target store to be relocated here.

The staff also reviewed and approved three minor modifications to existing PUD plans: a modification to the Charwood PUD sign (requested because the construction of the Menard's store would make the existing sign difficult to see); the addition of a small refuse enclosure at Tipton Park Plaza; and a modification to Shadow Creek Section 3 for treatment of landscaping and double-frontage lots.

Special Use Rezoning, SU Development Plans

The city considered 17 petitions involving special use zoning. Seven of the 17 were full-scale rezoning petitions. Five of the seven were recommended for approval by the Plan Commission and subsequently adopted by City Council; the sixth was withdrawn at the request of the petitioner; and the seventh was recommended for approval by the Commission in December and is pending before City Council. Six petitions involved major modifications to existing special use site plans; five were approved by the Plan Commission and one was withdrawn at the petitioner's request. The staff also reviewed and approved four special use site plans under the minor-modification procedure.

Other Rezoning

Excluding PUD and special use rezonings, there were seven rezoning requests processed in 2000. The plan commission recommended approval of all seven. The City Council concurred with the Plan Commission's recommendation on six rezoning requests; the seventh was denied.

Bartholomew County Zoning Map Changes

Three rezoning matters were filed for consideration by the Bartholomew County Plan Commission. Two dealt with industrially zoned property along old railroad rights-of-way that is actually farmland; the third concerned a business conversion in Taylorsville. All three rezonings were approved by the County Commissioners upon recommendation by the Plan Commission.

Zoning Map Changes for City and County: Statistics

Rezonings

5 approved: Persimmon Woods
Brands
Hennsley
Calhoun
Brubaker
1 denied: Puckett

SU Rezonings

5 approved: Booth Manor/Salvation Army
PAAL Football
Wiese/E. Col. Volunteer F.D.
Col. Regional Hospital (Hospice)
2nd Baptist Church
1 withdrawn: Russell Development

SU Major Modifications

5 approved: Northbrook
Garden City Church of Christ
St. Peters
Blackwell Park
Dunn Stadium
1 withdrawn: Lakeview Church

SU Minor Modifications

4 approved: St. Bartholomew
Hospice
Bartholomew County Landfill
Columbus Regional Hospital

PUD Rezonings

3 approved: Brex Park East
United Way/Arvin
Little Creek
1 withdrawn: William Marr Farm

Final PUDs

3 approved: Menard
Shadow Creek 3
Columbus Center

PUD Minor Modifications

3 approved: Charwood sign
Tipton Park Plaza
Shadow Creek 3

County Rezonings

3 approved: Gehring
Hassfurder

Abandoned RR (Simmons)

Annexation

In 2002, the planning department processed only one annexation petition, which was denied by City Council. This petition involved property on the west side of C.R. 175 W, north of C.R. 400 S and south of Deaver Road near Woodside Industrial Park. Concerns expressed by Council included questions about the adequacy of C.R. 175 S to support more intensive development. (The annexation request was accompanied by a petition to rezone the property from agricultural to industrial.)

Recent changes in state law have streamlined the process for annexations requested by the property owner(s), cutting the total time frame from seven months to two and simplifying other requirements. This should help Columbus accommodate development requests while ensuring adequate public scrutiny and review.

Subdivisions

The chart below summarizes the department's subdivision review during 2000.

Type of Subdivision	City of Columbus	Bartholomew County	Joint District
Administrative & Agricultural	41	39	0
Minor	18	32	1
Concept Plan	n/a	1	0
Major Preliminary	3	2	0
Major Final	7	0	0

Steady levels of subdivision activity continue in both city and county, although the pace has slowed slightly since the late 1990s. The county still sees more subdivision plats filed than the city, as is typical and expected.

Right-of-Way Vacations

During 2002, the staff processed 3 petitions to vacate public rights-of-way, all in the city's jurisdiction. Indiana law provides that these vacations can be accomplished only by an ordinance adopted by the legislative body. Two of these petitions were approved; the third was denied by City Council following public hearing.

Board of Zoning Appeals

Requests for developmental standards variances and conditional use permits decreased in the city jurisdiction, but slightly increased in the county, with total requests being 46, far below 1998 when the city and county had a combined total of 66 requests for variances or permits. The 2002 City BZA requests decreased from 2001 requests by 16 percent. The County BZA had an additional 4 variance requests or an increase of 26 percent over the previous year. The City granted approvals to 18 of 27 requests. The County approved 12 of its 19 requests.

City Requests

Type	2002	2001	2000	1999
Developmental Standards Variance	17	24	14	22
Use Variances	2	0	0	1
Conditional Use Permits	9	8	6	6
Total City Requests	27	32	20	289

City Approvals

Type	2002	2001	2000	1999
Developmental Standards Variance	12	16	11	20
Use Variances	1	0	0	0
Conditional Use Permits	5	3	5	5
Total City Requests	18	19	16	25

County Requests

Type	2002	2001	2000	1999
Developmental Standards Variances	9	8	7	5
Conditional Use Permits	9	5	9	10
Use Variances	1	2	0	0
Total County Request	19	15	16	15

County Approvals

Type	2002	2001	2000	1999
Developmental Standards Variance	8	8	5	5
Use Variances	1	1	0	0
Conditional Use Permits	3	3	5	8
Total County Requests	12	12	10	13

Flood Plain Management

The City of Columbus and Bartholomew County continue to be actively involved in the Community Rating System for the National Flood Insurance Program. In June of 2002, the City and County went through an audit of the Community Rating System and were re-certified as a Class 9 Community which will provide property owner's who purchase insurance through the National Flood Insurance program will continue to be eligible for a 5 percent reduction in their premiums in 2003. The City's Flood Plain Management Program that provides information and education to the community about flooding, flood loss and flood prevention. The purpose of this program is to reduce damage and claims of loss in the event of major flooding.

Staff has continued to assist the community by monitoring the City and County Flood Insurance rate maps and making flood determinations for home owners, real estate companies, lending institutions and insurance companies. The Staff again will give informative talks to local real estate agencies concerning the Community Rating System.

Landscape Review Committee

The city's Landscape Review Committee, chaired by Patricia Zeigler, has been a successful alternative to the Board of Zoning Appeals and a useful adjunct to Plan Commission and staff review of development proposals. The small size and informal nature of the LRC makes it possible to negotiate landscape solutions that suit the needs of the city and the property owners.

The LRC's month-to-month workload continues to grow. During 2002, the committee considered seven landscape plans which did not meet the letter of the zoning ordinance. All seven were approved, in some cases after considerable review time. One additional landscape plan (Golden Corral) is pending for review in early January 2003.

<u>Docket #</u>	<u>File Name</u>	<u>Action</u>
LRC-02-1	Toyota Tsusho	Approved
LRC-02-2	Persimmon Woods	Approved
LRC-02-3	Menards, Inc.	Approved
LRC-02-4	Hospice	Approved
LRC-02-5	United Way	Approved
LRC-02-6	John Counciller (Central & 15th St.)	Approved
LRC-02-7	ArvinMeritor Tech Center	Approved

Signs

Signage issues comprise one of the biggest parts of the Planning Department's workload. Of the 270 ZCCs issued in 2002, 130 were for signs - close to 50 percent. These ranged from simple temporary banners to signage schemes for major developments.

Sign Development Plans: The Zoning ordinance allows a large-scale project such as a shopping center or planned residential development to apply for a Sign Development Plan as an alternative to the standard regulations. These plans are reviewed by the Plan Commission. Typically, approval involves a trade-off between decreasing one category of signage in return for increasing another. In 2002, three sign development plans were reviewed and approved, as follows:

<u>Docket #</u>	<u>File Name</u>	<u>Action</u>
SP-02-01	Princeton Park	Approved
SP-02-02	Murphy Oil	Approved
SP-02-03	Fair Oaks Mall	Approved

Utility Connections Outside City Limits

During 2002, the city resumed its policy of allowing utility connections beyond city limits as long as the owner(s) completed and signed a waiver of right to remonstrate against future annexation. Litigation begun in the 1990s had led to preliminary judgments that the waivers could not be enforced. However, the city's legal advice in 2002 was that recent decisions were more favorable.

In 2002, the city processed four requests for utility connection outside the corporate limits: one for water service and three for sewer. The water request and two of the three sewer requests were approved, as follows:

<u>Docket #</u>	<u>File Name</u>	<u>Action</u>
UT-02-01	Kenneth Fields (Water Connection)	Approved
UT-02-02	Phyllis A. DeLap (Sewer Connection)	Approved
UT-02-03	James Miller (Sewer Connection)	Not Approved
UT-02-04	Lester E. Fox (Sewer Connection)	Approved

Site Plan Review and Zoning Compliance Certificates

As of 12-16-02, the staff had issued 270 Zoning Compliance Certificates for the year, including those for signs. Most of the non-signage ZCCs included review of a site plan for details such as landscaping, parking, traffic circulation, drainage, lighting, setbacks, height, and other aspects. These reviews entailed considerable staff time in both planning and engineering departments. Often more than one field inspection is necessary to review details or ensure compliance. Every new occupancy permit also requires a final inspection by planning staff for details such as landscaping or parking dimensions.

Census-Related Inquiries and Projects

The staff received and answered 49 requests from citizens or organizations for Census 2000 information. These ranged from simple data lookup requests over the telephone to written reports.

At the request of City Council and the Clerk-Treasurer, the planning staff also examined Census block and precinct data and prepared alternative spreadsheets and maps to aid Council in redrawing their electoral district boundaries, required by Indiana law to be completed on or before December 8, 2002.

Geographic Information System

During late 2001 and early 2002, a number of City departments discussed the possibility of creating a city-wide GIS coordinator staff position. For budget reasons the concept has not been implemented at this time, although there is still merit in continuing the discussion. In spring 2002 the planning staff was reshuffled to allow Thom Weintraut to take on GIS coordination duties.

The GIS continues to be helpful in creating and displaying map and aerial photo information during public meetings, such as City Council and Plan Commission public hearings. The system is used extensively to help citizens and professionals visiting the planning office visualize proposed projects or simply to see an overhead view of their property.

As a result of the city's MPO designation (see Metropolitan Planning Organization section), the city's GIS will need to be upgraded. MPO funds should be able to fund all of this upgrade. We expect that by the end 2003 the city will have a fully functioning internal GIS network for planning and engineering purposes. Later stages should include integrating city utilities into the network and making selected GIS information fully available on the Internet.

Board/Commission Member and Staff Development

In 2002, the planning department began a one-year series of customized training sessions for members of the city and county Plan Commissions, Boards of Zoning Appeals and legislative bodies. The training was facilitated by former planning staff member K. K. Gerhard-Fritz and is designed around six thematic sessions, each dealing with a specific local planning subject. Both citizen members and the professional staff have benefitted from the two training sessions conducted in 2002. Four more sessions are slated for 2003, one session every two months.

Other training opportunities in 2002 for staff, commission/board members, or both, included: attendance at the American Planning Association's annual conference in Chicago; attendance at the Ohio-Kentucky-Indiana regional planning conference in

Covington, KY; participation in several workshops on rural land preservation, geographic information systems, and floodplain management.

Board & Commission Members and Associates; Staff Members

Columbus Plan Commission

John DeLap, president
Page Gifford, vice president
David L. Hayward, secretary*
Steve Ruble, secretary**
David Bonnell
John Hatter
Shirley Todd
T. Craig Hawes
Jack Heaton
Gary Nienaber
Michael Thomasson
Pat Zeigler

Liaison from county plan commission: Tom Finke

Plan Commission Attorney: Alan Whitted

* City Engineer Dave Hayward resigned in June 2002 to accept a private-sector position.

** New City Engineer Steve Ruble was appointed in June as Dave Hayward's replacement.

Bartholomew County Plan Commission

Roann Whittington, president
Zack Ellison, vice president
Eugene Eckrote*
Keith Sells**
Mike Ferree
Tom Finke
Paul Franke
Tom Harmon
Gary Myers
Mark Dodd

Liaison from city plan commission: David Bonnell

Plan Commission Attorney: Cindy Boll

* County Council representative Eugene Eckrote passed away in February 2002.

** County Council member Keith Sells was appointed in March as Eugene Eckrote's replacement.

Edinburgh/Bartholomew/Columbus Joint District Plan Commission

Larry Taulman, president
Tim Barrett
Byron Carr
David Hayward**
Steve Ruble**
Larry Kleinhenz
Ron Richards

Michael Ryan

Keith Sells

Lewis Turner

Jack Heaton

Plan Commission Attorney: Cindy Boll

* City Engineer Dave Hayward resigned in June 2002 to accept a private-sector position.

** New City Engineer Steve Ruble was appointed in June as Dave Hayward's replacement.

Columbus Board of Zoning Appeals

Pat Zeigler, Chair

David Fisher, Vice-Chair

Karen Dugan, Secretary

Mary Ferdon

Gary Nienaber

Fred Stadler (alternate)

Eric Frey (alternate)

Mike Thomasson (alternate)

BZA Attorney: Alan Whitted

Bartholomew County Board of Zoning Appeals

Philipe Baumann, Chair

Zack Ellison, Vice-Chair

Ron Trotter

Bennie Whipker

Roann Whittington

Tom Harmon (alternate)

BZA Attorney: Cindy Boll

Planning Department Staff

Roger Hunt, Executive Director

Laura Thayer, Assistant Director

Tiffany Strait, Associate Planner

Heather Pope, Associate Planner

Thom Weintraut, Associate Planner

Marcus Hurley, Planning Technician

Sondra Bohn, Planning Assistant

John Butler, Planning Aide

Patty Whitson, Secretary (part-time)